

PRESS RELEASE

Dedicated servant, humble warrior ready again to take up fight for Texas veterans

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AUSTIN — An old warrior will resume his battles for Texas veterans on September 1 as Bill McLemore, a retired Army Lt. Colonel, Airborne, aviator, and Green Beret takes over the top spot at the Texas Veterans Land Board.

“Texas veterans couldn’t ask for a better advocate to fight on their behalf,” said Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson, chairman of the VLB. “Bill McLemore is a humble soldier and a dedicated servant who knows how to get things done and will work tirelessly to accomplish any mission he is given.”

McLemore is a familiar face as a veterans advocate in Texas. Before he retired from the U.S. Army in April 1986, McLemore served four combat tours — three in Vietnam and one in the Dominican Republic. He has worked for both Democratic and Republican administrations at the county, state and national level. Once his active-duty service was over, he was appointed by the Travis County Commissioners Court as the Travis County Veterans Service Officer, a post he held until being appointed by President George W. Bush in 2001 as Sr. Advisor and Deputy Assistant Secretary at the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, serving until 2008. From 2008 until his selection as VLB Deputy Commissioner, he served as a Senior Staff Advisor and Veteran Advocate to the Director of the VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network.

McLemore’s first encounter with the VLB was in 1987, when former Land Commissioner Garry Mauro threw a reception to welcome him as the new Travis County Veterans Service Officer. Former County Judge Bill Aleshire and Commissioner Pam Reed had recommended McLemore for the position.

“Judge Aleshire had been a Vietnam War protestor but he and Commissioner Mauro made me feel respected and welcomed — they trusted me to just do right by the veterans,” McLemore said. “That’s not really all that uncommon. When you are dealing with veterans and their families in Texas, there isn’t a partisan bone in anyone’s body.”

McLemore served as the Travis County Veterans Service Officer for 15 years, assisting veterans to prosecute their claims to the Department of Veterans Affairs and growing the office into the biggest one in the state. During his time as Travis County VSO, McLemore became the only non-attorney practitioner in Texas to be certified to prosecute claims before the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. He also inspired Aleshire, whose dad was a Vietnam combat veteran who died of service-related injuries, to take advantage of the Hazelwood Act and get his law degree at the University of Texas.

In 1997, McLemore was a key player in the legislation to create the first long-term care home for veterans since the Texas Confederate Home closed in 1954. He helped create a formula for the VLB to operate the homes without cost to taxpayers using revenues from its successful home and land loan program. The author of the bill was state Senator Jerry Patterson, now his boss at the VLB. There are currently eight Texas State Veterans Homes, strategically located across the state in Amarillo, Big Spring, Bonham, El Paso, Floresville, McAllen, Temple and Tyler.

Since taking office in 2003, Patterson raised the amount Texas veterans may borrow for a home from \$150,000 up to \$417,000. Buying land through the VLB has gotten easier, too. Under Patterson's direction, the loan process became faster and the minimum acreage that could be bought with a VLB land loan was reduced from five acres to one acre, making it easier for veterans to buy lots closer to urban areas. A Texas veteran can simultaneously have a VLB land loan, a VLB home loan and a VLB home improvement loan. Home improvement loans are up to \$25,000.

"The VLB has been able to do all this not by growing government, but simply by allowing Texas veterans to use the good faith of government to help them improve their lot in life," McLemore said. "Now, the challenge before us is that we have a new group of veterans and their survivors for whom we need to look at finding new benefits."

Texas has always taken care of her veterans. In 1836, the Texas General Land Office was formed, in part, to make sure veterans of the Texas Revolution were given land rights they were promised in exchange for their role in liberating Texas. In 1946, the Texas Veterans Land Board was created to do the same for Texan veterans of a different war who helped liberate the world.

Today, the Texas Veterans Land Board serves more than 1.7 million Texas veterans of all ages.

The cornerstone of Texas veterans benefits is the VLB's ability to offer below-market interest rate loans for land and home purchases, as well as for home improvements. For home improvements, the VLB allows Texas veterans to borrow up to \$25,000, with no down payment. The VLB's eight Texas State Veterans Homes serve more than a thousand veterans and their families needing long-term, high-quality care. The VLB also provides four dignified places of rest for the free burial of veterans with full military honors at Texas State Veterans Cemeteries in Abilene, Corpus Christi, Killeen and Mission.

"No other state can match what the VLB offers: low-cost home, land and home improvement loans; skilled nursing long-term care facilities and cemeteries — all exclusively for Texas veterans or their spouses," Patterson said. "And all of our programs are self-funding, which is good news for Texas taxpayers."

For more information on Texas Veterans Land Board home, land and home improvement loans; Texas State Veterans Homes; or Texas State Veterans Cemeteries, call 1-800-252-VETS (1-800-252-8387), or visit www.texasveterans.com.

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